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plenty of cars outside, if you haven't your own. We shall all meet in the vestibule."

Jermyn stood quite still and watched them pass him. He saw Gerald hand Sybil into the little coupé, which headed the procession of cars. She never looked back. As the coupé swept round the courtyard, however, on its way out, he fancied that he caught a gleam of a white face peering anxiously in his direction. He took a quick step forward. When it passed him again, however, his heart sank. It was surely a mask! Sybil was leaning back among the cushions, laughing heartily.

One or two of the others spoke to him, pointing out the cars that Gerald had engaged. Mrs. Levenden, indeed, seemed almost to expect his escort. Jermyn, however, with a murmured word of excuse, managed to escape. He made his way out into the Strand and turned westward.

JERMYN paused for a few moments on the steps of his club, but finally made his way directly homeward. It was solitude that he needed, solitude free from even the chance of unwelcome interruptions. He let himself in with a latchkey, and met Roberts carrying a small silver tray. The man came forward to assist him.

"Her Ladyship, Sir," Roberts announced, "is not feeling very well. I was taking her up some brandy."

Jermyn raised his eyebrows. "Where is her maid?"

"Her Ladyship found that Annette was suffering from neuralgia, and sent her to bed early," the man explained. "I was just wondering, Sir, whether it would be as well to have one of the other young women awakened."

"Where is her Ladyship?" Jermyn asked. "In her boudoir, Sir," Roberts told him. "She returned only a few minutes ago."

"I will see whether any assistance is necessary," Jermyn said. "You may give me the tray."

Slowly he mounted the stairs and knocked at the door of her sitting room. Lucille was lying on the couch, still fully dressed. She opened her eyes and turned her head a little wearily, but sprang up when she saw him. "Jermyn!" she exclaimed.

He set the tray down upon the table. "I saw Roberts in the hall as I came in," he remarked a little stiffly. "He told me that you were not feeling well and that you had sent your maid to bed."

The color was gradually returning to her cheeks. She raised herself slightly upon the couch. "It is very kind of you to come and inquire," she said. "May I have just a sip of that brandy? I am really quite all right now, though."

He handed her the tumbler. "I felt just a little faint when I came in," she explained. "We played too much bridge after dinner, and the rooms were so close. Then I remembered that I had sent Annette to bed, and it annoyed me. I am really quite all right now."

He stood by her side, looking down at her. She was still wearing her wonderful gown; but had removed her jewels, which were lying on the table.

"Are you sure that you wouldn't care to have one of the parlor maids sent for?" he asked. "Or I dare say that Annette is well enough to get up and help you now."

She shook her head. "It really isn't necessary. I shall be able to manage for myself quite well. Sit down for a moment, won't you?"

She stretched out her hand and drew a low chair close to the side of the sofa. Then she glanced up at him, and their eyes met.

"Please sit down!" she begged.

HE obeyed at once. She took his hand between hers.

"I am cold," she murmured. "I wonder why I am so cold?"

"Finish the brandy," he advised.

She shrugged her shoulders and drank it. "I want to talk," she said. "I think that that will do me good. Tell me where you have been."

"To a supper party at the Milan."

"Amusing?"

"I am afraid I didn't find it so," he replied.

A queer little flicker of sympathy parted her lips. In a sense she realized that she was responsible for his depression. Then her thoughts wandered away again.

"Did you ever feel tired, Jermyn,—so tired that every bone in your body ached, and your heart ached, and your eyes were hot, so hot and tired that sleep seemed an impossibility, so tired that you hadn't even the courage—" She broke off abruptly in the middle of her sentence. "Ah! but of course you don't feel like that," she continued, "and I don't want you to. It's stupid of me, isn't it, to be so dull just when you happen to have come in to see me? But I am tired tonight—I am so tired!"

There was something intensely pitiful in her slowly uttered words, in the longing that she could not keep out of her face. Jermyn felt once more that little lump in his throat. Once more the hateful consciousness of his callous brutality seemed to seize hold of him, to stir in his consciousness and in his heart a multitude of surging emotions. He bent over her.

"Won't you let me—" He stopped short. "Won't I let you what?" she asked a little breathlessly.

"Would you like me to carry you into your room?"

She held out her arms. Her smile was one of absolute self-yielding, yet it had in it something of her old brilliance. He lifted her up, amazed to find how light she was. Then he opened the door and passed into the inner chamber for the first time since their marriage.

"Put me down upon the bed, please," she begged. "I am going to rest there for a few minutes before I undress."

He obeyed her; but her arms still held him, although her eyes were closed. Suddenly she opened them. Her fingers gripped his, holding him with amazing force. There was a light in her face unlike anything he had ever seen in his life.

"Jermyn!" she pleaded. "Jermyn!" Her long arms were wound round him now with almost frantic force. "One word!" she faltered. "One touch!"

The wave of pity reached his heart. He stooped and kissed her on the lips.

CHAPTER XLI

FOR a two-year-old you are much too exhausting for a hot morning," Jermyn declared, setting down his boy upon the stone balcony. "There, run along to Nurse."

The child showed signs of objecting; but his nurse quickly caught him up and disappeared. Jermyn remained for a moment, looking out over the gardens, radiant now with all the perfumed perfection of spring flowers and foliage. There were beds of wonderful pink and white hyacinths, long borders of yellow crocuses, with patches of anemones and banks of daffodils. In a corner where the sunshine lingered longest the early roses were breaking into blossom, and in the distance was a delicate cloud of pink and white blossoms from the walled fruit garden. The master of Annerley drew a little sigh of content before he passed through the open windows into the small morning room, where breakfast was arranged at a round table drawn up close to the balcony.

"Her Ladyship is not down yet?" he asked Roberts, who was standing at the side-board.

"Not yet, Sir," the man replied. "The gong has gone twice."

Jermyn shook out the letters from his post bag and ran them through at first carelessly enough. Then he stopped short. Even after three years the sight of Sybil's handwriting was not without its effect upon him. He glanced at the foreign postmark, with the name of the hotel on the outside of the envelope. Then he opened it almost eagerly and settled down to read it. It was dated from a town in the far west of America:

MY DEAR JERMYN.—Your cables and letters of congratulation to Mary and Gerald have been more welcome than I can ever make you understand. They have made all the difference so far as I am concerned, and have taken quite a load off my mind. Knowing them both as well as I do, Jermyn, you can imagine what joy it gives me to realize absolutely their love for each other.

We seem, somehow, at the other end of the world; but I cannot tell you how happy we all are. Gerald especially is delightful. He and Mary insist upon taking my whole tour with me. We have a private car and go from place to place, and really I think we all behave like a party of children. Gerald and Mary go sight seeing at every opportunity, and always come back with a wonderful account of their wanderings. I have unfortunately to spend a great deal of time in the theater, as the audiences out here like plenty of variety, and we have to change our program continually. I dare say you sometimes see the papers, and you know that America has been much too kind to me. I have had heaps of offers to stay on here—well, nearly for the rest of my natural life; or my working life, at any rate. But we are all coming back directly this tour is finished.

I am going to write you a longer letter in a few days. I want to write you more fully about Mary and Gerald. I do not think that you will blame me—I don't really see how anybody could. They are simply devoted to each other, and it is the greatest happiness imaginable to see them together. You know what Mary has meant to me all my life, and you can imagine what it means now to think that my care of her is so delightfully rewarded. I am sure that Gerald's people, however they may feel just at first, cannot help loving her in time.

I am writing you in great haste for this mail, Jermyn, because half an hour ago I received a letter from your wife that puzzled me and has made me just a little uneasy. To explain it I



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